



San Diego County DPLU News

Spring 2009

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IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES FOR ADVANCE PLANNING:

April 22 Board of Supervisors:
Accessory Dwelling Units

For more information and additional upcoming meetings, please visit the Calendar on our Web Site at

www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/gpupdate/index.html.

From the Director

Hello everyone,

We're very pleased to be sending you our first Department-wide Customer Newsletter. We'll be putting these out every quarter to keep you up to speed on what we're doing as a department and how we're working to improve how we serve you, from the developers and homeowners who bring us projects, to the communities, stakeholders, interested groups and general public who are affected by the land use process.

I'd like to say that I'm personally proud of the work we're doing here at the County and that we're striving to become the best land use agency we can be.

Until next time,

- Eric Gibson, Director, Department of Planning and Land Use

Advance Planning News

General Plan Update

The Department of Planning and Land Use (DPLU) completed the 60-day public comment period on its first Draft General Plan Update on Jan. 30. Since then, the General Plan Update team has been reviewing the public's [comments](#) and revising the plan. At the same time we continue to work on the plan's Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Both the Draft EIR and the revised Draft Update will be sent out for public review early this fall. The General Plan Update continues to be on schedule to be presented to County Supervisors for consideration in Fall 2010.

Progress Reports to the Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors

Staff will be giving a Progress Report on the General Plan Update to the Planning Commission on May 8, 2009 at 9:00 am in the DPLU Hearing Room, 5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B, San Diego, CA 92123. The report, once available, will be posted to the General Plan Update website.

Staff anticipates presenting the Progress Report to the Board of Supervisors on May 13, 2009. More information will be available closer to the Progress Report date.



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Advance Planning

About Advance Planning

Advance Planning is the DPLU Division that deals with long-range planning, the “vision” side of the land use system that strives to create safe and livable communities.

We are responsible for creating and maintaining the County’s General Plan. It is the document that sets the philosophy and policies that determine what gets built where, and how communities will accommodate growth while preserving character and protecting what those communities value. We also oversee the Policy and Ordinance Development teams (PODS) that review our land use regulations and laws to ensure they are relevant and make sense.

The biggest project we’re working on now is the General Plan Update, the first overhaul of the County’s General Plan in 30 years.

To get more information, go to our General Plan Update Web page at: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/advance/

Advisory Group Meetings

We have tentatively scheduled both a Steering Committee meeting for May 2 and an Interest Group meeting in early May at the County Administration Center. More information will be available on the [General Plan Update Website](#) and future editions of the DPLU Update as we get closer to the meeting dates.

Community Plan Update

We are currently reviewing the Community Plans that our community planning and sponsor groups have submitted. For questions contact your Community Planning/Sponsor Group Chair or County staff at gpupdate.DPLU@sdcounty.ca.gov

Policy and Ordinance Development :

Landscape Ordinance Update

Looking to improve local water conservation, the Board of Supervisors directed DPLU on Oct. 15, 2008 to report on regional efforts to create a “model landscape ordinance.” The State released its own [draft model ordinance](#) Nov. 26, 2008. Our staff is currently working on changes to the County Water Conservation Landscape Ordinance to be consistent with the State’s ordinance. We’re also working with local water agencies and other jurisdictions to make sure we’re all consistent. Staff will return to the Board on this matter later this spring. (Staff Contact: [Dixie Switzer](#))

Accessory Dwelling Units

Advance Planning’s staff is processing Zoning Ordinance changes that would simplify the County’s accessory dwelling unit regulations and make them easier for the public to understand and follow. The changes would reduce the number of types of dwelling units from four to two: Second Dwelling Units and Guest Living Quarters. The amendments would also change some of the limitations on those dwelling units. The Planning Commission recommended approving the Zoning Ordinance changes Feb. 13. The changes will be presented to the Board of Supervisors at their April 22nd meeting. The proposed ordinance changes can be seen online at the [DPLU Advance Planning website](#). (Staff Contact: [Heather Steven](#))

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Building Division News

More Parking!

Customers visiting our Ruffin Road DPLU offices will be happy to find it easier to park. The County's Health and Human Services Agency recently moved its offices down the street, a move expected to free up "a few hundred" spaces a day at Ruffin Road.

Did You Know?

- That County Building Inspectors also serve an important function when disasters strike?

Building Inspectors perform an important role in disaster response by quickly assessing the damage done to people's homes and properties. They're among the first to enter damaged areas, following fire crews and law enforcement. Law enforcement makes the call on when evacuees can return to stricken communities. But building inspectors help the public by quickly reporting to evacuees, governments and aid organizations the extent of damage. That can be tough in large, spread-out communities like unincorporated San Diego County.

After the 2007 wildfires, County inspectors and Geographic Information System staff members filed reports in less than a week on more than 1,000 destroyed homes and 1,200 other structures over a 500 square-mile area.

Fee Deferral

Reaching out to help the region's construction industry, County Supervisors voted unanimously to allow builders to temporarily delay paying traffic, parks, drainage and sewer impact fees until they finish building their projects, starting April 24.

The temporary deferral plan was created specifically to help the local construction industry through the current recession and is scheduled to end in June 2011. The fee deferral applies to builders of residential tract developments and commercial projects and is a voluntary program. Builders have had to pay impact fees when they started building their projects, creating a debt they could not recover until the projects were finished and sold or occupied. The deferral program will let them put off paying the impact fees until they finish building. That could save builders thousands of dollars in upfront fees and provide the financial boost that would let them start building projects they would otherwise delay. Supervisors Ron Roberts and Bill Horn proposed the deferral program to help the local the housing and building industry, which have been hit hard by the current recession.

Quick Business Counter

Our "Quick Counter," modeled after supermarkets' "10 items or less" lines, is working well, serving 30 to 40 customers a week and cutting wait times for customers.

The Building Division introduced the pilot program in February, specifically to cut the wait times for customers who had permit business that could be taken care of in 15 minutes or less. It operates from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. Monday through Friday. Before the new service, customers who had business that could be handled quickly, such as replacing a water heater or paying a bill, had to wait in the same lines as applicants who were processing larger, more time-consuming business, such as getting permits to build a house or commercial building. Creating the quick business line is not only shortening wait times for those who use it, but also our other customers by taking 30 to 40 people each week out of our afternoon counter lines. The quick counter is operating at just about peak efficiency, if you figure it can handle roughly four customers an hour and is open 10 hours a week.

The Building Division limited the quick counter's operations to two hours each day because it has not added staff to run it. Instead, we have shifted existing personnel to operate it. DPLU plans to reassess the program after six months.



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Important Building Division Telephone Numbers

Building Offices: (858) 694-2960

Toll Free: (800) 411-0017

2003, 2007 Wildfire Survivors:

(858) 694-3876

Building by the numbers:

Average Wait times: (Through February)

Building Counters: 15 min.

Building Project Pre-Submittal Counter:
23 min.

Zoning Counters: 23 minutes

Building Permits Issued: 305 (January-February)

Building Inspections Conducted: 4,078
(January-February)

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Building Division News

Service First

The Building Division is working on other customer service improvements, including finding new ways to further reduce the time that customers now spend in lines.

When customers currently come to our lobby with their projects, they start out at our center kiosk. Staff members there direct the customers to the counter they need to go to first. When they're finished at that counter, they're directed back to the center kiosk to be told where to head next. We're working on a process that would eliminate trips back to the center kiosk. Instead, customers would be directed to their next destination at the counters, saving them time.

Online, not In Line

DPLU and the Building Division have created several Web-based tools to help customers by reducing wait times and offering new services people can use without coming to County offices. Here are some of those!

- **Research building permit and property histories:**

- <http://landinfo.sdcounty.ca.gov/Index.cfm>

- **Apply for some building permits:**

- <http://sdcountyluegepay.com/kivanet/citizen/>

- **Estimate your permit cost:**

- <http://sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html#feest>

- **Find building forms:**

- www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldgforms/index.html

- **Answer zoning questions:**

- www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/docs/444.pdf

- www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/zoning/index.html

- **Check average counter wait-times:**

- www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/bldg/bldg_waits.html

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Multiple Species Conservation Programs (MSCP) are designed to let development and environmental preservation live comfortably side-by-side — to let development continue in our County while still making sure to set aside environmentally important habitat to protect endangered plants and animals collectively, in groups, rather than one-by-one.

MSCP Plans do that by identifying sensitive land, and allowing it to be set aside — either by buying it or creating incentives to leave it as preserves — in linked blocks of habitat throughout the County.

The County is crafting its plans with the help of computer modeling and input from scientific advisors and the public. Planners take general information already known about San Diego County's native habitats — coastal sage scrub, chaparral, grassland, vernal pools and others — to determine where endangered plants and animals live. Computers then take that information and identify blocks of property that could become MSCP Plan areas. Over time, it is pieced together into a connected preserve system. That happens as development occurs and provides the ingredients needed for the MSCP recipe: money to buy land, people willing to sell land, and the need to create environmental mitigation.

The County of San Diego has prepared, or is preparing, three MSCP Plans: ones for South County, North County and East County.

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Multiple Species Conservation Program

South County Plan

We expect to present the 2008 Annual Report for the South County Plan — which was approved in 1997 — to the Board of Supervisors this summer. After we've presented the Annual Report to the Board, we will hold the Annual Report Workshop. For more information about the South County Plan, how we continue to acquire land and monitor the plan, go to: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/sc.html.

To find the plan's annual reports from 1998-2007, go to: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/ar.html.

North County Plan

The 45-day public comment period for the preliminary Draft North County Plan we released Feb. 19 ends on Monday, April 6. Once the comment period ends, we will begin using the input to help create a revised version of the plan. We expect to release the revised North County Plan and the plan's initial Draft Environmental Impact Report-Environmental Impact Statement for public comment at the end of this year. The North County Plan remains on track to go to the Board of Supervisors for approval in 2010. To find out how to comment on the North County Plan or to see the plan and its appendices, go to: www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp.

To find an interactive mapping tool that will let you see how your property may fit within the plan, go to <http://gis.co.san-diego.ca.us/imf/sites/mscp>.

East County Plan

The public and interested groups can see the East County Plan's [preliminary draft map](#) at our Website. We encourage the East County Plan's Steering Committee, community groups other interested parties and the public to offer their opinions about the draft map. We introduced the preliminary map at the Jan. 22 Steering Committee meeting. We will refine the preliminary map based upon the feedback we get from the public and State and federal wildlife agencies.

To find more information about the East County Plan, go to www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/mscp.



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Did you know?

- California has the second highest level of endangered species in the U. S., after Hawaii.
- San Diego County is one of the most biologically diverse counties in the contiguous U.S. with more than 400 rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species.
- San Diego County is home to 1,573 native plant species, 26 of which are unique to the area.

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Multiple Species Conservation Program

Quino Checkerspot Butterfly / Amending the South County Plan

The County is currently working to improve the South County Plan by providing protective habitat for the Quino checkerspot butterfly. The butterfly was put on the federal list of endangered species in 1997, the same year the South County Plan was approved. However, the insect's populations have sharply decreased in recent years. The butterfly's populations are now limited to parts of San Diego and Riverside counties and Baja California. For more information, please go to: www.sdcountry.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/quino.html.

San Diego County Farming Program Plan

We expect to send a memorandum to the Board of Supervisors this spring to update them about the San Diego County Farming Program Plan that Planning Commissioners approved in December 2008. The plan represents the next step in implementing County policy that says farming in the county is valuable and should be supported and encouraged. The plan aims to promote and protect San Diego County's \$1.5 billion-a-year agriculture industry in several ways, including streamlining the regulatory environment for farmers and increasing dialogue between farmers and County agencies.

To get more information, go to: www.sdfarmingprogram.org.

Board Accepts Vegetation Management Report

The Board of Supervisors unanimously accepted DPLU's Vegetation Management Report in March. The Board asked that a comprehensive vegetation management report be prepared because of the tremendous loss of lives, homes and habitat from the 2003 and 2007 firestorms. The report provides an overview of the wild-fire problem in San Diego County and summarizes high priority areas that could be targeted for vegetation management planning. It also provides a description of the types of fuel management tools that are available to reduce fuel loads in certain areas. To see the Vegetation Management Report, including its appendices and attachments, go to: www.sdcountry.ca.gov/dplu/mscp/.

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What is a Conditions Clearinghouse?

When people submit projects to DPLU seeking approval, those projects must meet conditions set by many different land use departments to make sure they're safe and livable and comply with local, state and federal regulations and laws.

Currently, applicants and others have to visit or call those land use departments, such as Planning and Land Use, Public Works, Environmental Health, and Parks, to check on how proposed projects are meeting the conditions set for them.

The "Condition Satisfaction Clearinghouse" will change that. It will create a cumulative online checklist that anyone can access by computer. County staff from the different departments will be able to check off conditions in a central repository as they're met.

The end result will be an online ledger where the public, developers and planners can track the progress of projects and see whether they're meeting the conditions set for them.

The clearinghouse could spark other improvements. It could cut Planning and Land Use counter wait-times by letting more people get information from the comfort of their homes or businesses, rather than by waiting in line for help at County offices.

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Project Planning

Conditions Clearinghouse

Project Planning recently completed the book of conditions that will be key to a new service, our "Conditions Satisfaction Clearinghouse." The new clearinghouse service is expected to go online by the end of May. It will improve how we serve our customers — from developers, homeowners and planners to the general public, communities and interested parties — by providing an online venue to track the progress of the projects submitted to the County for processing.

Baca Named to Mining Board

In February, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Brian Baca, a Chief with DPLU's Project Planning Division, to the California State Mining & Geology Board. Baca previously served on the board from 2001 to 2005. The nine-member mining board has several responsibilities. It sets the state's policies regarding seismic hazard mapping to help protect the public from the dangers of earthquakes. It also represents the public's interest in developing and restoring mining lands. And it represents the state's geology interests and acts as the final arbiter for miners, counties, cities and other "lead" jurisdictions when there are disputes about mining projects.

Development Review Team

Our Development Review Team has now reviewed 60 projects since it was formed in October 2008. Created as part of DPLU's Service First-Customer Service initiative to improve our planning process, the team gathers senior managers from all departments to review big, complicated and potentially controversial projects early in the process. The team collectively identifies issues for the projects early on. That keeps applicants better informed and empowers Project Managers to make decisions they might have previously deferred.

Project Issue Resolution

Project Planning has improved its Project Issue Resolution (PIR) process, which may find solutions faster when sticky issues stall projects. The PIR process was created to let customers ask senior managers to step in to help solve issues when customers and project managers could not. We've improved the PIR process to also allow Project Managers request the help.

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Code Enforcement by the Numbers:

Complaints Responded to: 376
(January-February)

Did You Know:

- That County Code Enforcement Officers responded to nearly 3,000 complaints (all within 24 hours) in the 2007-08 Fiscal Year.

Code Enforcement

Ramona Cleanup

County-commissioned crews cleared the charred remains of a Ramona home destroyed last Halloween in an alleged arson.

Finishing up two days of work on St. Patrick's Day, crews removed more than 100 tons of ash and debris and more than seven tons of scrap metal that had remained in a three-foot-high pile on the Mt. Woodson property for months.

The home was destroyed in an early-morning explosion-fire that killed a 24-year-old man.

Frustrated neighbors had to live with the mess when no-one stepped forward to clean up the debris.

County Code Enforcement stepped in to help at the request of Supervisor Dianne Jacob and started an abatement process.

Service Issue Resolution

The Code Enforcement Division has introduced a new "Service-Issue Resolution" process that will give some unhappy customers the opportunity to sit down and talk about their case with senior-level managers.

Modeled after Project Planning's Project Issue Resolution meetings, the new process could be used in cases where a customer had not been able to resolve an issue with their Code Enforcement Officer. For example, in instances where a customer wanted more time to comply, or when they disagreed with the officer's interpretation of the code.

The meetings won't give customers a venue to appeal a decision already handed down, to ask to have fines waived or to argue a case involved in litigation.

The new resolution meetings are part of DPLU's "Service First Initiative," the department's action plan to improve its overall customer service.

Forms and directions for how to request the meetings have been posted on the Code Enforcement Web page at <http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dplu/ce5/index.html>.

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